

Cell Metabolism's Editorial Process

Cell Metabolism editorial practices are by no means specific to us. However, given the frequency with which we receive certain questions, even from experienced authors, I thought it would be good to explain who we are and what our editorial process is. I would like to outline our scope, editorial times, and review process and very briefly touch on data presentation.

I caught the biology bug early on at Cambridge University while attending Ron Laskey's molecular biology course; I was especially captivated by the concept that came from the Weintraub lab that a single transcription factor could change the fate of a cell. I would eagerly flip through issues of *Nature* each week and, in doing so, developed a strong desire to develop a broad knowledge base by becoming part of making the science appear on paper (it was paper at the time). Though *Cell Metabolism*'s breadth is narrower than *Nature*'s (!), tongue-in-cheek, I will say that metabolism is the underlying weave of biology.

Cell Metabolism is run by a team of professional editors. I am very proud that my team and I are all passionate about science and that we are excited to be working with our authors to publish cutting-edge metabolism research papers and reviews. Each paper that is submitted is read in detail by one of us and discussed with the team in the context of the field and the existing literature. We do not specialize in particular subtopics so that we can have a better overview of the range of disciplines covered by the journal and keep an open mind about differing schools of thoughts in various fields. On average we aim to read and discuss newly submitted papers within three days. We look for scope, significance, and soundness.

Our scope is "metabolism"; though admittedly a broad and expanding topic, the subtext is often "physiology." For significance, we are looking at how much the paper extends the field's knowledge and how likely it is to be broadly accessible. Though there is an element of subjectivity in this, our focus is to prioritize concepts. In an age where "keyword reading" is common, my hope is that most of you will take a look at the journal issues and, besides articles of direct relevance, find ideas in other articles that you can apply in your thinking. For soundness, we carefully evaluate how the data presented support the conclusions.

I am often asked what sort of articles we are interested in, to which my answer is "all sorts." We publish primary research papers from model organisms to humans, on topics including diabetes and obesity, mitochondrial biology, circadian metabolism, heart and cardiovascular biology, gut microbiome, stem cell metabolism, immune-metabolism, and cancer metabolism, to name a few. We also publish different types of articles including clinical and translational studies, refutation articles, resource articles, and short articles; naturally, we publish a range of review articles as well. We consider each paper individually, wherever it comes from, whoever it is from, and whatever metabolic topic it is about—we don't necessarily have a mold that papers have to fit into. Not all papers have to be revised (it *can* happen, honest!) and we don't feel that every "i" has to be dotted or every "t" crossed in order for a paper to be published in *Cell Metabolism*. The editorial team works very closely with reviewers and authors to move papers toward publication.

We are acutely aware that a general community concern is lengthy overall times for publication. Since becoming the Editor-in-Chief four years ago, one of my emphases has been to address this issue at *Cell Metabolism* by shortening review times and streamlining the scope of revisions needed for publication. Our editorial team makes every effort to render a carefully weighted decision based on detailed reviewer feedback within three to four weeks for new submissions. This process is usually faster for revisions, though it may take longer if the revisions and/or the feedback are not straightforward. No paper sits unattended by an editor for more than a couple of days (except perhaps around the big holidays!), and we use constructive and prompt experts who are familiar with our standards. We ask reviewers to send their comments within ten days of agreeing to do the review—though, being cognizant of their other duties, we are sometimes willing to wait an extra week, prioritizing a thoughtful review over speed. If the reviewers we first ask decline, we then send out new invitations, which can lengthen the review cycle as the countdown only starts when a reviewer agrees to review rather than from the submission time; this can be a source of confusion for authors who may not realize that reviewers can have different deadlines. Regarding revisions, our editorial thinking is that it is best for all parties that the journal considers only one major revision of a paper, and we work hard to avoid repeated cycles of revision and rereview that do not move the paper forward in a substantive way.

To help us and our authors better focus on key issues, we started explicitly asking our reviewers to list which three concerns, *if any*, would need to be addressed if we were to consider publishing the paper. If there are too many concerns that could be answered in a reasonable time frame, we will decline to consider the paper further for the journal. Our editors often go back to the reviewers to clarify specific points or discuss the feasibility of experiments when distilling reviews. Since most of our papers are multidisciplinary, we weigh reviewers' comments differently according to their expertise in making our editorial decision; it is not simply a tally of "yeses" and "nos." We are open to discussing reviews with authors, sometimes before we make a decision, and will consider explanations as to why some of the reviewers' requests may not apply. Our pool of reviewers, which we keep expanding, includes experts spread across the world and at different stages of their careers in both academia and industry. Our reviewers are not all from our editorial board, and yes, we honor reviewer exclusions even if it's an editorial board member. Our editorial board members are not handling editors and therefore know of papers at the journal in their capacity as authors or reviewers. In my experience, most papers we publish are strengthened by the peer-review process, and I believe that many of our authors would agree with this. We are really thankful for all the hard work that our reviewers put into helping us achieve this.

I would also like to take the opportunity to briefly mention data presentation and urge our authors to critically evaluate what data are critical to buttress their conclusions: "less is often more." I do not mean to encourage holding back data, but rather to focus on the

main point of the paper and not become overly distracted with tangents. I understand the urge to show everything, but such papers can become unwieldy and difficult to assess, and their main message becomes diluted. In my opinion, a strong emphasis on presentation of experimental data germane to the conclusions could help support data integrity. Data integrity and reproducibility, the latter being another growing concern, are issues that we, as scientists, need to keep addressing at all levels. These are obviously very complex matters that will need a more thorough discussion another time. It saddens me greatly when I hear throwaway sentences that “most biomedical papers are not reproducible” and hope that we can stem this tide and improve our societal stance.

In closing, I would like to thank you for allowing me the privilege to be your Editor. It has been and continues to be a real pleasure, as well as an honor. Thanks to all of our authors, reviewers, advisors, editorial board members, and colleagues that help make *Cell Metabolism* a journal that you enjoy reading. The practices outlined above are some of the measures we have set up at the journal to serve the community. Can we improve further? Absolutely! Please feel free to contact me or the team with any thoughts, questions, suggestions, or feedback, as we want to keep improving the journal to address the needs of the growing metabolism community.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cmet.2014.07.020>